The Beauty of the Rain

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The Beauty of the Rain

by EarthsickWithoutYou

Summary

Part one of my Deathgram AU -- in which Hannibal discovers that Will has taken a lover who resembles him strikingly, an ex from his past in New Orleans. A man named Clifford Unger who bears the weight of the world on his shoulders, riddled with self-doubt, regret, trauma and grief. But he considers it his mission in life beyond all else to cherish and protect Will Graham, the light of his life, his redeeming soulmate.

Now that he has Will back in his arms, Cliff won't let *anyone* hurt his boy, even a clever, scheming, crazy-shocked-jealous therapist/cannibal who has been playing with fire and may now pay the price.

Notes

*__note:__ Cliff's backstory in this fic is close to how it is in Death Stranding; essentially, I left in the harrowing life of a soldier and the loss of his family, and removed the post-apocalyptic, sci-fi aspects of that (freaking amazing) universe.
*__another note:__ Hannibal and Cliff look alike but aren't related; Will has a type 🥺🔥 and who can blame him?

See the end of the work for more notes

How it falls

"*Your mind is a pool and I dive in / Your mind is a pool and I swim / Your mind is a car that I ride in / Your mind is a car*

And suddenly I'm hiding in it..." -Iris

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1. Everything is blue

Hannibal blinked against the mid-morning sunlight, which seemed to blaze right into his irises and consume all of the color in the air. Surprising, that Wolf Trap, with its tall pine trees he often thought of as Will's special external fortress from the outside world, should let the light blaze in that way.

He didn't care for the momentary disorientation; it seemed too close a match or too suitable a companion for a certain undercurrent of discontent he'd been struggling with of late. While he felt, deep down, without wanting to acknowledge it fully to himself, that he cared too much for Agent Will Graham and had grown tired of playing with him, even hurting him, when it once seemed so appealing an amusement, this feeling could not be helpful.

It might be hurtful.

If succumbed to, it risked his cover and carefully constructed, perfect life. Will Graham was posed without even being aware of it, like a beautiful fall breeze, stealing through the house of cards that was this constructed world of Hannibal's, with the distinct threat of blowing it all over.

Wielding the power to destroy Will Graham, he would be wise to consider it self-preservation and defense, if not good, plain common sense, since the game no longer entirely pleased or sat well with him. Yet the feeling stayed in his eyes and his mind like an accusation even after he blinked several times and restored his full vision.

He'd been blind before meeting Will, unaware of his own vulnerability. Truth be told, he was not sure it had existed before Will, but it seemed now to be taking him over like an unruly inkblot on a perfectly smooth ivory ribbon, soon to spread over and recolor him entirely, expanding the depth and possibilities of the vulnerability he feared like the plague. He supposed the inkblot would be blue, or sage green, or gray, or all three, as Will's beautiful eyes were. And that he was a fool for thinking about those colors so often.

Hannibal had made an excuse to come to Will's on an unannounced house call. Telling himself it was simply to monitor the boy's symptoms, without knowing if he was doing that to make sure the sickness ate him alive, or to know when to stop it and save that strangely beguiling creature who had him so involuntarily besotted. He made fresh meat pies, hoping at least to reawaken his old self with an amusement, feeding the profiler tasked with finding the Ripper, with the human remains of his deadly trophies.

It felt wrong. He didn't care about morality, it wasn't about that, or even doctor/patient ethics, which he picked and chose his occasions to favor.

No, this was about how his heart sank and his hands trembled, which would not do. He'd conquer this as he had any other weakness in the past which had confronted him only to be destroyed by his superior force of character. His stubbornly voracious survival instinct.

He took the trembling hand, turned it into a tight fist, and knocked on Will's front door.

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2. Ghosts of the past

Hannibal could hardly believe his eyes, and thought the sun must have gotten stuck in them, or he'd somehow caught the encephalitis from Will, which he knew was impossible but had never seemed to be, not when it came to that particular sweet, fevered heat.

He must be hallucinating more than Will ever had. Because he was looking at himself, standing in Will's doorway, blinking in the same unaccountable overflow of September orange sunglow, right back into his own baffled amber eyes. The stranger's eyes were a piercing dark green, one notable difference in their appearances that did not offer much comfort.

But at least it proved definitively it wasn't Hannibal hallucinating that he encountered himself. It was a man around his own age of forty-eight or a little older, with salt and pepper hair such as Hannibal would have if his pride allowed him to stop dying it. Wearing a suspicious and unimpressed expression, with the cool, deceptive calm of a mighty panther which knew exactly how to strike with a single deadly blow, the stranger leveled him with a more determined narrowing of his eyes once his vision cleared with a few blinks.

Everything they did seemed to mirror, yet defy each other.

"Good morning," Hannibal made himself say smoothly, as if he hadn't a care in the world when really, all he seemed to have in this thunderstruck moment were cares. He almost felt careworn, like a threadbare blanket no one might want anymore. What a bizarre sensation; disgusted, he shoved it away and put on his pride.

"Morning," the stranger replied curtly, exhaling smoke through his nose from the cigarette that dangled casually from one hand.

He wasn't wearing a shirt, which formed its own kind of shock given where he was and at what time of day. His upper body looked quite similar to Hannibal's as well, right down to the chest hair and that slight roundness to his belly.

But this bizarre doppelgänger's form was a bit more sculpted, honed like a muscular weapon. A *coiled* panther, liable to lash out at any time. Perhaps even likely to lash first, ask questions later, if at all.

All the man wore was a pair of dangling silver dog tags, slightly dented, which said “Unger,” that was all Hannibal could make out as the sun glinted through the pines and off the necklace, and a pair of camo-print army trousers which had obviously been thrown on, rather carelessly in the spur of the moment.

The moment being the knock at the door. The fly and button on the pants weren’t even fastened, and the man leaned on the door frame as if he owned the place and served as its security detail.

“Who might you be?” The man’s hair, loose and unstyled, fell over his forehead with a sheen of silver that made Hannibal regret dying his after all. The stranger put out his cigarette on an ashtray apparently left just inside the front door, in Will’s living room (also the bedroom, since the only rooms separate from the main living area were the bathroom and kitchen).

“Oh, please, do forgive me,” Hannibal said, pasting on a fake polite smile and putting his hand out. The stranger reluctantly shook it. “I admit I was distracted by our odd resemblance for a moment there. I’m Dr. Hannibal Lecter."

“Is that so,” said the condescending intruder of Will’s formerly peaceful abode.

Hannibal wanted to grit his teeth but instead added, ”Will’s colleague, therapist and friend.”

“We do look alike,” the stranger mused, “But at the same time, we don’t, if you know what I mean. At any rate, kindly explain how exactly you are Will’s colleague therapist friend, since that is two different conflicts of interest. You’re also on his front porch at 10am, unannounced, suggesting a greater intimacy...or else an attempt at it.”

This unknown man, who had the nerve to pose like a model casually in the door of Will’s house, who was shirtless and acting proprietary, as if it was for him to shield the boy from his own soulmate! Ridiculous. Unquestionably Rude.

Hannibal’s smile changed into a colder incarnation. “Be that as it may, I didn’t catch your name, and therefore won’t be addressing any impromptu interrogations from you.”

“Cliff?” Will’s voice sounded from further inside the house. “Who is it, babe?”

His bare feet padded slowly to the door and he yawned when he finally appeared by – Cliff’s side, looking incredibly sweet with sleep-tousled curls and contented peace in his expression.

Will wore a shirt, but to his therapist’s horror, it was army green and obviously belonged to Cliff (Cliff had to go) hanging more loosely on Will’s smaller body. The shirt, rumpled and tossed on over Will’s grey boxer briefs that made Hannibal want to faint with the pure sexiness of him, brought out such a gorgeous green-gray in Will’s eyes. His very lickable and bitable toned biceps, plush lips, adorably elfen ears, and every other feature seemed to swirl before Hannibal’s gaze like he was being hypnotized by a sort of brainwashing beauty.

Hannibal could still smell the fever, but Will’s mood was far more stable than he’d ever seen it. He felt sick himself at the realization, sick with jealousy that churned in his gut like poison.

BABE?

He fantasized gruesome scenarios and lavish recipes, all devoted to this infernal "Cliff." His smile became an evil smirk, but when Will looked at him even that defense fell.

"Oh, hi, Dr. Lecter." Will put his glasses on; he'd had them loosely held in one hand, every movement languorous and comfortable. "What brings you by?"

His eyelashes fluttered with innocent curiosity, yet Will was always thinking deeply and this was no exception. He kept his perceptions of Dr. Lecter close to his chest and that had always served to drive the Ripper mad. What was he thinking? With all that fascinating and incomparable empathy, he obviously must feel the enmity boiling between the two men he conversed with. But, somehow, he remained calm and casual (!!).

Will looked so well-rested. No denying it, he was glowing, so perfect and lovely, Hannibal had never seen him more so. He looked happy, even in his own skin. That skin was lightly marked with obvious love bites, particularly on his neck, all over it, in fact (Cliff was going to die).

"I was in the neighborhood and thought I'd see how you were feeling," Hannibal endeavored to say as if Cliff not only wasn't standing there, wrapping an arm around Will's waist, but as if "CLIFF" didn't exist at all, which he obviously *shouldn't.*

Not if he knows what's good for him.

"I brought homemade meat pies," he added, really pouring on the charm and still ignoring Cliff (and the fact that he was intruding on an obvious lover's morning after. Which Hannibal refused to acknowledge.).

"Really?" Cliff raised his eyebrows and kept his big, strong hand right where it was, on Will's waist. Firm and familiar. "What kind of meat?"

Hannibal finally stopped ignoring him. He glared hatefully at the rival and stated bluntly, "The dead kind."

"Thank you, that's really sweet of you," Will enthused, partially to try and quiet Cliff's apparent disapproving remarks. He did seem pleased at Hannibal's extra effort in visiting and bringing the food, not getting worked up, but certainly appreciative.

Hannibal wanted him all worked up.

He wanted that perfect, pretty boy hanging on his every small indication of affection, like he had been before, he wanted Will starving for him. Who was this despicable interloper?

It was apparent, at any rate, that Will Graham had a type when it came to men he found attractive. Instead of growing more used to the resemblance it became more staggering with every second that passed. This might be due to the stubborn manner in which he continually blocked out any thoughts of their near-familial resemblance and how insignificant it made him feel, and simultaneously trying to forget Cliff, which was a great deal of work even for

him with his prodigious and intimidating intellect. Hannibal felt reduced as a human being, a person and a person in Will's life, to be more clear, and mildly dizzy. He would ignore that as well.

"Lovely to meet your friend," Hannibal smiled at Will and gave him the plastic-wrapped plate of small, savory pies. He wished the delectably flaky crust was stuffed full of dead Cliff. "I should be going now, instead of intruding on your time together."

"Ignoring me won't make me go away, Dr. Lecter," Cliff scoffed.

"*Cliff,*" Will muttered as if in affectionate chiding, definitely not mad or even annoyed. "*Stoopppp.*" He actually *giggled*. "Sorry, Dr. Lecter, but Cliff has always been protective of me."

Always?!?!. Hannibal swallowed back the urge to vomit that suddenly rose in his throat with a disgusting touch of bile. Why wasn't it him by Will's side? What had he done to deserve this?

It did not happen to occur to him that he had gone out of his way to keep Will both at arm's length and under a clinical manipulation so cold, calculating and severe that it almost entirely negated the chance Will would ever forgive or love him, should he one day learn the truth.

That he had betrayed Will's gentle and fragile trust even though his heart screamed at him not to.

That Will smiled at Cliff with what distinctly seemed to be big, sparkling stars in his eyes when the light shifted and changed them back to deep blue, oceans drowning Hannibal. Will looked at Cliff with love and complete, never questionable trust. A forever type of trust.

It did occur to Hannibal that it was too late for him to salvage his own chance of winning Will's heart, when it never would have been all that difficult to begin with if he'd simply stopped the therapy once he noticed how strong his desire was. If he had only asked Will out on a date at that time instead of instigating the encephalitis adventures...he'd stolen their romance from under himself and did not know how to piece the teacup together again, if Cliff intended to stand there crushing it down to the ground with his foot.

He was infuriated, hurt, wounded, felt the victim, and anything else he could think of except for to blame, of course. Naturally. Of course. *Right?*

"Where are you running off to so soon, Dr. Lecter?" Cliff inquired, as if suddenly so friendly. "Why don't you come in and we'll heat up that delicious food you've brought. Nothing like dead meat to start off a new friendship, I always say."

"You're welcome, of course, if you'd like to," Will agreed, smiling. "And if Cliff intends to behave."

To Hannibal's possibly irrecoverable horror, Will bit his pretty lip and blushed at how Cliff tried to protect him from any possible danger, so vigilant. A guardian angel standing watch to hold the devil at bay.

The dogs barked from inside.

“Perhaps they mistrust the strange man in their home,” Hannibal remarked snidely, making eye contact with Cliff for the first time in a few minutes. Acid thrown at him could not have made his loathing more obvious.

“Aw, no it isn’t that,” Will said with another yawn, as if he’d been soundly fucked the night before and was still fairly exhausted while desiring another – *no. No, no. Unbearable.*

Cliff smiled as if quite pleased. “The dogs smell the food, that’s all, obviously.”

So haughty. The ego! The nerve! How dare—? *Who is this man, after all?*

Why did Hannibal feel overdressed, stuffy and silly all of a sudden in his three piece suit and designer coat, compared with Cliff in nothing more than cheap, tacky dog tags and yesterday’s pants with something suspiciously resembling sex hair that he did not want to think about, and would not think about?

“I’d be entirely delighted,” Hannibal accepted in his number one most wonderfully mesmerizing, amiable yet authoritative and trustworthy tone.

As usual, Will seemed to accept it from him as true to his identity, although he also sensed there was more to Hannibal than the surface level older man with the rumbling, soothing voice and endless supply of good, convenient advice in his time of need.

He just hadn’t decided what it was Hannibal could be hiding and therefore didn’t say anything. Perhaps one day he would. Hannibal would rather have been called out right there and then as the Chesapeake Ripper if it meant Cliff would go away forever. A fair trade, surely.

“Perfect, then come on in,” Cliff grinned, again as if he and Will were married and paying the mortgage together in neat monthly installments.

What nonsense.

“Let me make another pot of coffee,” Will offered.

“I don’t mind,” Cliff began as Hannibal said “I can help,” and Cliff gave Hannibal a pointed look.

Will’s vivid eyes flitted back and forth between his lover and the recently acquired close friend with all those gray areas that still confused him. The rivalry was happening over him, did he like it? That, at least, meant Hannibal was still in the game – if it was true.

Inscrutable as ever, maddeningly mysterious and brilliantly perceptive, Will said nothing and let the other two figure it out for themselves.

“You’re the guest. Our guest.” Cliff smirked, throwing on one of Will’s flannels and only bothering to do up three buttons, which were about as many as would have connected over his larger, very powerful looking form. “Have a seat. I want to know absolutely everything

about you, doctor, such as how Will came to be in your care and with such a unique extension of your relationship that has you regularly interacting as patient and doctor, two friends, and co-workers."

He slapped a coffee filter in the pot and dumped in two scoops of Folger's dark roast while seeming to be king of all he surveyed.

Hannibal seemed to be an exile.

"Oven details for those?" Cliff asked lightly, giving Hannibal time to think about the questions he'd just lavished on him with such snide accusation.

Assuming the worst about me, why? Again, how outrageous. And unforgivable. There will be a reprisal...'Cliff.' If that's even your real name.

"425, ten minutes," Hannibal said, trying to outdo Cliff by seeming even more at home than he, but the dogs kept gravitating more towards Will's... friend....in the borrowed flannel, only to be shooed away and wander to Dr. Lecter for a second best option of company and food requests.

After everything I did for you, he thought angrily towards the seven dogs.

Then the food was ready, smelling wonderful along with the bitter-dark coffee freshly brewed and placed on Will's small wooden table in three large mugs, while the golden-yellow and russet-shaded leaves drifted poetically down from the sunny, mean-spirited sky to make the lovers' "morning after" scene even more romantic, warm and special.

Even to Hannibal from outside the relationship, the love was blazingly obvious; so was the feeling of "a new beginning," crisp as the autumn breeze which had seemingly foretold a much happier outcome of his visit to Will. The love was in little looks between them, quiet smiles, shared jokes and incidental touches that lingered like the bite marks on his precious boy's alabaster skin.

"I'm inclined to ask about you first, instead, seeing as I've been in Will's life consistently for the past several months, while you, comparatively, appear to have fallen from the sky."

"Ask away," Cliff said with the same confident smirk.

Hannibal glanced at the rival again as Cliff drank his coffee. Hannibal knew he had his foot pressed and playfully toying with Will's under the table and it killed him. A slight shake in Cliff's hands. An alcoholic? No, he couldn't be that lucky, surely. He could hope.

But he was military, and so PTSD was much likelier. No point denying these small but crucial observations to add into his arsenal while building The Case Against Cliff. Keeping his attention to this task kept it away from picturing someone who looked like him, but was somehow a better version, sane and kind and honest, loving Will and making love to him all night in the nearby bed with its messy sheets which neither had bothered to strip and clean as yet.

Hannibal burned his tongue on the hot coffee but could not burn the images away except by redirecting himself to building the case. Aha. A lighter mark in the shape of a ring on Cliff's attractively tanned left hand.

Please, please...please let him be a cheating husband of some innocent wife... abandoned and pining miserably in whatever decrepit hovel this idiot crawled from to try and take Will away from me...please?

"A married man?" Hannibal asked, coyly.

"*Hannibal,*" Will scolded, still not too loud and not angry, but slightly surprised as if he expected better of his therapist.

They had been growing so close in many ways, thanks to Hannibal's constant manipulation of Will's instability and tendency to violence, so how did they end up here, where he was the wrong one and Cliff was right? He the stranger when it ought to have been the other way around?

"I'm a widower." Cliff frowned, offended and more than that, slightly upset even by having to mention it, perhaps mentioning it to someone unworthy of the personal confidence.

He would be a widower! The poor, sad, trembling survivor of combat and loss...the perfect lover for Will to idealize. This was unfair!

Hannibal was so. *Angry.* Without anywhere to put it at the moment (no place that he wanted to put it at least, lest he drive Will even further away).

He wished he could bring the dead wife back to life and kill her for being dead and ruining everything, freeing Cliff up for Will; he wanted to stab Cliff to death right there with the knife in the nearby butcher's block, watch him bleed out. But to his indignation, he knew it was possible Cliff would move faster and stop the attack before retaliating. That tightly wound, wounded panther was nobody's fool, and knew his way around any kind of physical skirmish.

"Is that so?" Hannibal managed, mimicking Cliff's earlier remark to him when they first met. It wasn't a nice thing to say, but only Cliff knew that, since he cloaked it in false concern and followed it with "I'm terribly sorry to hear of it."

Which – honestly, he was. The wife would be an extremely valuable asset.

Cliff didn't bother with thanks, and Will held his hand on the table, which was sickening as well, when Hannibal already felt sick, and wouldn't be sampling the pies or enjoying the knowledge of them eating human meat without knowing it. That almost made him feel worse for some absurd reason.

Festering in the disease of his unforeseen crisis, Hannibal pushed his case further, hoping to find some evidence, any small clues, that Cliff was a villain after all, not a heroic, brave, damaged veteran.

“Please, tell me more about yourself, in your own words, Cliff,” he asked, using a kind tone with sinister eyes.

“Let’s see,” Cliff sighed, squeezing Will’s hand. Sipping the coffee he poured as if he’d put down roots in Wolf Trap with Hannibal’s destined lover and did not intend to leave again.

As if he’d come home to the home Hannibal had forfeited – no, he could not bear to let the awareness of this into his conscious mind.

Cliff lifted his chin pridefully and met Hannibal’s glare head on. “Where to begin?” he pondered, dragging one finger down the back of Will’s hand, then tracing every knuckle, intoxicated by Will even when the physicality couldn’t be on the level he seemed to want.

“Oh,” Cliff resumed, “I know where to start my story. You see...”

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3. You sound so good to me

“*River is wide and oh so deep / And it winds and winds around / I dream we're happy in my sleep / Floating down and down and down...*”

-Sheryl Crow

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24 hours earlier.

Cliff almost turned around and went back into the airport five times. What was he *doing*? He couldn't, or at the very least *shouldn’t* disrupt Will’s life this way.

It wasn’t showing up out of nowhere, exactly, or as if he wasn’t expected. During one of their bittersweet phone calls, Will said Cliff was welcome to visit anytime, and Cliff answered, “Well, maybe I’ll take you up on that someday.”

“Someday soon?” Will laughed softly. “You won’t really come.”

“Sure I will.”

“I want to see you, if you want it, too. I miss you Cliff.”

Longing tightened in Cliff’s chest, butterflies in his stomach Will had controlled for many years startling to life again, even his frequently half- forgotten libido suddenly roaring and needing and craving with a hard desperation. *Will, oh, Will*. For one kiss, what would Cliff not do? He hated to be selfish and turn out a disappointment but God, it was Will, after all, and he was only human.

He put his forehead against the kitchen wall, closed his eyes and tried to breathe when his hand shook because of the bomb from last year. He adjusted his sweaty grip on the phone and said “I might not be the same guy you remember. The one you miss. Seeing who I’ve become

might make you miss that other guy too much. I don't want to let you down or hurt you, Will."

After all, this was more important than Cliff's own happiness. Cliff, who would die just to hold Will close in his arms and smell his hair, feel those beautiful hands and strong arms returning the embrace. His *Will*.

Cliff had an ache in his soul named after this ex, the one who got away, years ago, after they'd dated while he was stationed in New Orleans.

Will was a homicide cop, until he decided a federal investigator was a better fit for profiling skills so sharp and a desire to lessen the amount of violent encounters, given the attack that left him with a scarred shoulder when he couldn't pull the trigger and stop a criminal in seconds. Despite his ace, perfect aim. What a rarity. A purely good person who could be deadly and selfish anytime he wanted – clever and talented, quick with his hands, he acted unselfishly instead every single time.

Cliff knew there was nobody better than Will in the world, and nobody who deserved this angel-eyed sweetheart less than he did.

"I think I still know you, Clifford Unger," came Will's tender reply, sending splintering cracks through the concrete of Cliff's attempt to hold back from him. "Why not let me be the judge?"

Will was so gently insistent. His love, resilient.

"You can't be that different," he added with an affectionate laugh. "The Cliff I remember never thought he was good enough for me, either. We had that in common. Guess we canceled each other right out of the relationship."

"Those two sound like idiots," Cliff chuckled, opening his eyes, leaning back, breathing more steadily, the tremor in his hand calming.

"Let's not be them. Let's be us and see what happens."

"I'm a bit of a mess now, kid, honestly. Worse than I even let on. Didn't want you to worry..."

"I always worry about you."

"I worry about you, too," Cliff admitted.

"Cliff? We don't have to keep letting time go by without us seeing each other, while we both worry. If you think about it, that sounds as dumb as the rookie cop and seasoned soldier who threw away a perfectly good true love to give each other a chance to find something better."

Cliff had only called Will because he just couldn't stay in one piece unless he heard the boy's voice every now and again.

So at the time, he hadn't meant it when he promised that he'd visit Wolf Trap "someday."

But then, that soft ache in Will's voice wouldn't let Cliff go. And he had a feeling something in Will's own life was not quite right. Will didn't sound happy, and even seemed more stressed than usual. Cliff couldn't have that, now could he? It was worth the chance of losing his ex's memory-softened image of him if Will might be in trouble and need his help.

And he could tell that, though he didn't deserve it one bit, Will had his beautiful heart set on him coming to visit. He wanted to introduce Cliff to the dogs and show him the river near his house. Cliff had always been terrible at saying no to Will.

So, he took that chance, hoping it wasn't a huge mistake, memories of Will remaining a constant source of comfort on his many dark days, and he didn't want to continue their story if it wouldn't have the right ending, one where he was there when Will needed him, come what may.

He finished his cigarette in the airport parking lot, standing beside his rented car. He looked at the clear, calm sky. Cliff had been almost everywhere, he sometimes felt, but never Virginia, oddly enough. He could already tell it was beautiful, while knowing that was mostly because he knew he would see Will.

It was the first time in twelve years they'd been in the same state. Will was so close. Cliff was dying to see him. He couldn't go back into the airport and run away.

Maybe they could still get that real happy ending. Cliff would always wonder if he ran now. He'd be a fool to run from a chance like that, a once in a lifetime second chance at real, unforgettable love.

Still, that wasn't what made Cliff get in the car and drive to Will. To Wolf Trap, towards the tree-dotted horizon.

It was just Will. His laugh and sadness, his beautiful soul that Cliff yearned for. His gorgeous smiles and priceless laughter.

The nagging suspicion hovering like a cloud over Cliff's heart whenever Will mentioned his life these days, his job, his health. Will said he was fine but Cliff knew better. No way he'd leave his boy in trouble, no, he'd already decided that, hadn't he? Time to stick to his resolve. Stop being the shaking combat veteran, survivor and griever, remnant of his past self and constant plan- abandoning disappointment. Be better than that, for Will.

He hoped for their sake none of Will's work colleagues were mistreating him. Because Cliff wasn't going to stand for that. Not at *all.*

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4. You and your beautiful soul

"I know that you are something special

To you, I'd be always faithful

I want to be what you always needed

Then I hope you'll see the heart in me" -Jesse McCartney

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At a small country store in town, Cliff stopped in and bought two fresh bouquets of flowers, a bunch each of sunflowers and daisies, fragrant and happy-looking. He couldn't decide between the two and anyway, Will deserved to be spoiled.

He freshened up as best he could using the men's room in the local diner to change from his usual green t-shirt and camo pants into his nicest apparel, a gray button-up shirt with blue pants and decent shoes. He took off a tie and put it back on countless times, or it felt that way.

Bracing his arms on the sink, trembling, he breathed. *Okay, okay. Just decide.*

He looked again at the reflection in the mirror in front of him.

"No tie," he said aloud, "You look like an ass." Without it, he looked halfway presentable.

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Arriving at Will's house, he licked his lips, cinnamon breath from a hard candy on his tongue. He didn't want to smell of cigarettes, not for Will. He looked at the flowers in the passenger seat and it was sort of like seeing his own heart sitting there. He wondered if the bouquets were cheesy and foolish and only made him look the same. Unlike the neck tie, Cliff decided he'd give Will the flowers, formal and "silly" or not. Trying too hard or not. Maybe it didn't matter. Compared to...well. Compared to not being able to offer Will anything worth having.

Of course, Will might recoil at seeing this shadow of his former self he had become.

God knows I do.

He might not stay here long, might not be wanted anymore than he particularly wanted to occupy his own skin a lot of the time.

Maybe he was no good for Will anymore, just damaged goods.

Even still, he could give Will Graham daisies and sunflowers. How lovely they were, how beautiful and vibrant, just like Will. For too long, flowers had held nothing more than funereal associations for Cliff. It felt nice to let that change.

Even if he had nothing else worthwhile to offer, Cliff could brighten his day a little, maybe. That felt like the most important thing he'd had a chance to do for ages. He grasped the two bouquets.

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There had been the matter of his ring, too, but he knew Will wouldn't have minded either way that he still wore it. He wondered, though, would Lisa want him to still wear his wedding ring after all these months following her death?

The truth was, he knew she would want him to try and find love again, to be happy. She knew he would never forget him or the child they had lost, a son named Sam. They would remain in Cliff's heart forever, cherished. Mourned. Appreciated, another source of trauma but he hoped, someday he could keep the good and not be so totally ripped apart by the bad. Life had so much tragedy in it, and he'd endured pain beyond what he'd ever be able to describe. Flashbacks and the shakes ruled a lot of his days.

But he could still hear his late wife Lisa with her kind voice and how she told him during the very early stages of their relationship, a few years after the break-up with Will, "I want you to find your place in this world and enjoy it. Stop wandering and doubting yourself already, because you're wonderful and deserve that place."

He took the ring off and put it in the traveling bag he left in the car in case he didn't stay. In case Will didn't want him to stay, after all.

And it wasn't easy, but he made himself go up the very nice, country-rustic looking front porch, admiring the classy, laid-back, cozy house nestled in the remote woods. He shook his hand out, then knocked on the door and didn't run away before it was answered.

That alone felt like a new beginning.

It was only to be expected that when he opened the door, Will would take Cliff's breath away that easily. But Cliff still wasn't ready for just how hard it hit him, a sight for eyes beyond sore, more like almost destroyed from the nights he'd cried rivers and thought he'd never make it through the pain of losing his family.

Will was even more beautiful. Stunning, perfect. Everything Cliff wanted.

Seeing Will felt like all the stars in the heavens fell down on his head in the middle of the day, and as if the universe suddenly righted itself after twelve years without any trace of symmetry.

Will still had the kind of fairy-tale-prince good looks one normally does not see in mere real-world mortals. Cliff felt like an old man, even beyond the fourteen year difference in their ages. He felt like he'd aged too much because of the fighting and the loss.

But Will's whole face lit up, then went from confused and sad to overjoyed, and he cried out in surprise, relief and unchanged affection, "Cliff? You're here, you're really here! You came?"

Cliff was so blown away he could only stare, trying to remember what words were. He choked back tears and nodded, in lieu of a verbal response. Will was crying, too, and he was laughing, pulling Cliff into his arms for a big hug. Holding Cliff tight and rubbing his face against his thundering heartbeat through the gray shirt, saying over and over "I'm so glad to see you, I'm so happy you came, so glad you're here, Cliff, oh, God. You don't even know."

"Will," Cliff answered, his voice strained and his eyes finally crying a river of happiness instead of grief and fear. "I, um..."

They drew back just a little, not releasing each other entirely. Cliff's hands were still on Will's back, caressing his warm body through the thin white t- shirt he wore with jeans. Will cupped Cliff's face in both hands and just looked at him, learning him all over again, no disapproval at the new crinkles by his eyes to join the others he'd seen in the past, no problem with the silver that had taken over his hair.

Will's expression was closer to that of a man who hadn't seen the sun in years, and now witnessed a glorious sunrise or sunset, knowing he'd get to do so again at least a few more times. Letting that be enough for now.

But all of a sudden, Cliff didn't think it would be enough for either of them. They looked into each other's eyes, and then their lips were crashing together and they held on even tighter. And tighter. Warm, perfect kisses with his handsome, brilliant, funny, sweet Will.

Was Cliff dreaming again? Will tasted too real, felt too substantial in his arms. He never wanted to let his boy go again. He'd protect Will from any threat that might be making him feel sad or afraid. He needed to keep this, so badly, it hurt. And his hands began their tremors at the thought of losing Will, of not getting to have these kisses and hugs, these tears and this laughter, everything they could still share together for many years to come. The flowers dropped to the porch, having been forgotten in the kiss. Cliff was more concerned with the mouth against his, just as soft and sweet as he remembered, and maybe even more so.

"Are you okay?" Will asked, concerned, with more tender smiles. He'd take care of Cliff, too. He worried about Cliff and now he wouldn't have to worry anymore. Cliff would make it so Will never worried again, if he could. He'd do his very best.

"I am now." Cliff kissed Will again and ran his hands through the chocolate curls. He put his forehead against Will's and sighed again, "I am now."

"Did something fall?"

"It's what I was trying to mention before," Cliff laughed, reaching down, scooping up the bouquets, presenting them to Will not like the pathetic shell of a man but like a *man.* A man in love. Who, if Will wanted, was here to stay.

He grinned at Will, marveling at how it felt to do that with his face after at least three years of never going past a faint smile. His cheeks were sore with it, he ached and felt gratitude for that ache. It had saved him.

"I um, I brought flowers." He showed them to Will thoughtfully, trying to straighten out any that were a little bent or crooked from the fall.

"They're beautiful, you're so thoughtful, Cliff. I can't believe you're here. Just– I want us to spend so much time doing nothing but this. This."

He took the flowers and hugged them to his chest, urging Cliff into the house with a tug on the older man's shirt. "Get your ass in here," Will giggled, open-hearted. The tired look of him when he'd answered the door had been in total opposition to this other Will, the one surprised by Cliff.

Cliff was woozy with kisses and the scent of daisies, sunflowers and Will, piney aftershave, clean-sharp soap, and the taste of him. His lips weren't only warm, they were hot and they pressed to his with hunger and smiles, grins, moans.

The invitation made Cliff remember he'd lacked the confidence to even bring his bag with him, and now, now his dreams were coming true.

"How could I refuse?" Cliff murmured between even hotter kisses, backing Will into his house and kicking the door shut with a light but firm nudge. "Oh, Will. I could never refuse you anything. I'd do anything for you."

Will cried out softly when Cliff pushed him against the wall and kissed him with wanton fervor, teasing with his fingers pushing the boy's t-shirt slowly up, feeling all that smooth skin as his desire raged through him, making him understand he never had a chance in hell of feeling otherwise.

"Yes," Will moaned again, then again, with Cliff's mouth on his neck and when Cliff pulled off his shirt. He stared into Cliff's eyes with the demanding petulance of a dark, unruly, exquisite angel with a heart of gold.

"You'd do anything for me, Cliff?"

"Yes, baby, anything. Always." Still nosing and nipping at Will's lovely neck and smelling his skin, fighting an unbearable arousal with the need not to go too fast. But they were going to make love. It was going to be good. They felt like a hand and glove reunited. No wonder life had been so cold while refusing himself the privilege of going back to the one who could warm him up again.

Will held him and Cliff knew he'd give the boy his still-beating heart ripped from his chest if Will wanted it. There would be no regret and even the agonizing pain would feel like heaven.

But it wasn't what Will asked for. Instead, Will just said two words, from the bottom of his own heart.

"Then *stay.*"

We the dreamers

Chapter Notes

cw: smoking

Thanks again to the wonderful Sage for conceiving of this AU and putting it in my hands!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Twelve Years Ago
Lafayette, Louisiana

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"*I'll always miss you and I'll always wish you'd been mine.*" -Kate Voegele

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“So, are you finally gonna give up the saintly act and admit this is a date?” Will inquired, tagging along after Cliff through the woodsy park.

Grand, enormous trees framed a luscious field where flowers seemed to have sprouted up anywhere they damn well pleased, from plucky dandelions, too yellow and new for wishing on, to delicate pink primroses, cheerful buttercups and bright butterweed. The latter dotted bushes growing thick around a winding river, dappled in glittering sunshine.

Squirrels darted to and fro as if Will and Cliff had wandered into a Disney cartoon, and Cliff had been singing under his breath, another Frank Sinatra standard as he seemed to do at times without realizing it. Only when he was happy, Will noted with a burst of joy in his heart. He loved that low, rumbling sound of Cliff’s absent-minded music, and tried never to mention it as it made Cliff self-consciously notice he was singing and then stop doing it.

For Summer in rural Louisiana, this was a splendid day; the air felt lovingly warm, even enchanted, although Will thought it might be his infatuation with the hunky soldier by his side that had him in such a wistful mood.

Cliff had no idea whatsoever that he was a hunk, stunningly handsome and sexy man; miraculously he never seemed to notice, and only did his best to look “decent,” as he said. Utterly mystifying. Will was out of his mind with longing to make Cliff aware just how attractive he was, in every way he could wickedly devise.

They had driven outside the city to spend the whole day together, and Will was bursting at the seams with excitement.

But there was a little problem: Will was the only one who wanted to discuss the reason for their special day.

Cliff laughed, swinging the picnic basket. “It’s not a date.”

“That doesn’t quite explain why you’re *blushing*.” Will kept pace with the older man, despite his excitement and desire almost making him stumble.

He tried to play it cool, but he was pretty sure Cliff knew he didn’t feel any such thing. Will was a grown man and a police officer, dammit, on his way to making detective at an unusually young age, and he was clearly a mature, established man in his own right. But the second Cliff walked into a room, or in this case, a park, Will was nothing more than a gawking, besotted sixteen year old lusting after an unobtainable teacher.

It helped Will’s awareness of his own silly behavior that Cliff was transparently going through the same struggle, but his fond smiles in Will’s direction let the young police officer know for sure…he was being an awkward dweeb.

Oh, well! So be it. Will couldn’t hold back from Cliff, not after a month of friendship and almost kisses, not on such a beautiful day. The need to finally cross the line to romance and seduction was eating him alive.

“It’s the sun making my face flushed,” Cliff countered, blushing more.

“Right. C’mon, it’s a date, it’s a beautiful, romantic picnic – how is that *not* a date to you?”

Cliff sighed and stopped by the clearing he’d apparently scouted out as a perfect picnic spot. The soldier gave Will a reproving, yet lustful look that sent shivers down his spine, then spread a lovely quilt down on the soft, emerald green grass.

Overhead, a gorgeous old oak tree stood tall, branches spread wide and flourishing with enough leaves to block the hotter sunlight. The orange glow snuck between the branches in all kinds of small places, as if glimpsing the tentative romance developing under the tree’s watchful protection.

Will’s reflections on the natural world were only ever this relaxed and optimistic around Cliff. In Cliff’s company, he always felt that life was finally simple, laid-back and honest, and it was the best feeling. A sense of total safety such as he had never known.

Cliff sighed, realizing, as he unpacked the basket, Will was still watching him, eyebrows raised, awaiting an answer.

“Look – we’re friends,” the older man reasoned. “I can do something nice for you without having an agenda.”

Will straightened the other side of the blanket while Cliff smoothed it out more, mainly to keep himself busy, it seemed. In a silent reply this time, Will made sure their hands brushed

and their shoulders bumped.

He couldn't blame himself, even if his flirtatious antics were slightly embarrassing. Cliff made him so bold, it felt incredibly refreshing. And *God,* the way Cliff looked.

So damn handsome and strong, so big and soldierly, there was no other way to put it. In that snug-fitting olive green t-shirt and camo pants, Cliff looked good enough that Will's mouth watered, not from hunger. The only appetite distracting him at present was the idea of putting his mouth on Cliff's beautiful neck and feeling those muscular arms wrap around him tightly.

Will just knew there was a fierce hunger simmering just under the precarious surface of his "friend's" platonic attitude. He was going to bring it out and have it for his own if it was the last thing he did.

"Ohhh, an *agenda*," Will smirked. "As in, you're a man with human desires…"

Cliff's dog tag necklace swung a little as he sat down and went on arranging the food, face getting rosier and more nervous-looking by the second.

"I don't desire you," he offered feebly, sage green eyes fleeing Will's deep, knowing blue gaze.

Will sat down cross-legged, then changed to a more lounging stance to show off his own attire for the day, a pair of tight jeans and a gray t-shirt with a low v-neck, plus his nicest leather sandals. A spritz of the light, citrusy cologne his aunt had sent him for Christmas finished the effect he hoped was just too casually sultry to resist.

"You're not too old for me, Cliff."

"Will, you know I am. I just…you ask me to spend time and I can't say no."

"Why?" Will asked softly. "Please, nothing about 'friends' this time."

"Because I love…" Cliff bit his lip as if Will almost "caught" him.

"Yeesss?" Will asked, batting his long, dark lashes dramatically.

Cliff groaned. "Spending time with you. As –"

"Lovers."

"Friends." Cliff gave him another pointed look and extended his hand, revealing that he held a small container of fresh berries.

Will felt petulant at the moment. He accepted several ripe, plump berries, making sure to slowly rub them on his lips, then suck them on his tongue until the juices flowed. Swallowing slowly, Will licked his lips and made hard eye contact, behaving shamelessly and not caring.

Cliff looked like he needed a cold shower.

“Okay, I get it,” Will smiled ‘innocently.’ “You don’t want me? Fine, I can let it go.”

As he buttered a slice of bakery baguette, Cliff frowned. “Is this a trick?”

“What?” Will scoffed. “Me, trick *you,* my very good friend? Really, Cliff…”

He took a piece of baguette from Cliff, caressing the older man’s big, warm hand along the way, and then ate the flaky, soft bread in the very same savoring manner he’d done with the berries.

“Oh, good grief!” Cliff threw his hands up in consternation, unable to hold back a smile. “You innocent little angel.”

Will sat up straight. He folded his hands, gave a prim smile and cast his eyes aloft to the heavens, adding a fluffy little sigh for good measure.

“You’re a devil,” Cliff accused, chuckling.

“That’s not very nice. Yet, you brought this delicious lunch on a stunning day at this conveniently secluded place, this hideaway, full of the beauties of nature. And look.” Will pulled a cold bottle from the basket and showed it off. “You even brought champagne. Though you would never ply me with liquor.”

“I wouldn't!” Cliff declared. He popped the cork and poured champagne into two plastic cups, passing one to Will, sucking his lower lip again. “You’re of age to drink. If you don’t want any, just give it back. With the way you’re carrying on, I could use a second cup right after the first.”

Will stared into Cliff’s eyes, then gulped the champagne. “Delicious. Oh! We forgot to toast. To us?”

“To us,” Cliff grinned and rolled his eyes, and they sipped the bubbly drink as the chemistry between them sizzled.

“I’m only making friendly conversation. We should share important things about our lives, that’s what friends do, right?” Will shrugged. “The most important thing on my mind lately is wanting you. Now, I get that my affections and desires are tragically unrequited. And I can stop trying to get you to confess that you feel what I do, but don’t ask me to pretend I’m not dreaming about you taking me down on this blanket…”

“Will Graham.”

“Clifford Unger. *Sir.*” Will saluted stiffly, then winked, adding another coquettish smile.

“You would benefit from an authority figure in your life,” Cliff snorted another laugh, his eyes sparkling and his shy smile a special one only Will could bring out. “Little brat, always pushing the limit.”

“I’ve found the ideal authority figure to help me mend my wicked ways. Alas, he doesn’t want to.” Will pouted. “Such is the way of the cruel, cruel world, I suppose…”

"*Something's* cruel," Cliff sighed, sipping his drink, staring at the grass. "Or some*one.*"

"Am I an angel or a devil, Cliff?" Will bit into a brownie and sighed at the rich, chocolatey flavor. "*Mmm,* so yummy. A shame you'll never find out which one I am, heaven-sent ingenue or a malevolent lust demon."

"As if those two are mutually exclusive," Cliff accused.

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"I honestly can't understand what you see in me," Cliff admitted as they strolled through the park together, slowly taking in the birdsong, the grass and wildflowers swaying in the breeze, the quiet peace of the whole place.

There was nothing here but nature and the two of them, which for Will could not have felt more perfect.

"I *know,*" Will groaned gently. "It's just such a weird phenomenon. Yet, I think there's words for it. Hmm, yes, I know what it is. Must have something to do with the fact that I'm in love with you."

Will let his hand briefly graze Cliff's where it hung chastely by his side. Probably all sweaty and nervous like Will's own. His heart skipped a beat and his stomach swooped with every deep, piercing gaze Cliff couldn't help casting over at him.

Cliff stopped short, laughing anxiously. "*Will.*"

"Maybe you don't necessarily mind me being younger, maybe it turns you on like it turns me on," Will pointed out brazenly. "It makes me a *brat* when you won't take me. I'm yours, do you know what it feels like to belong to someone who won't lay a hand on you?"

That was all Cliff could take before he was backing Will against a tree, kissing him wildly. *Finally!*

Will's heart felt like it would explode with the sensation of Cliff's mouth colliding with his own, Cliff claiming what was *his,* hot and heavy. Every part of Will that didn't feel hopelessly soft, small and needy felt hardened and tensed in painful, pleasured anticipation. Electricity coursed through him in waves of hot and cold tingles, and he moaned, "God, Cliff, yes–"

Will clung to him, feeling his powerful, broad back, sliding his hands down to Cliff's trim waist, daring a grope of his round ass as the older man moaned gruffly into his mouth. Their tongues slid wetly together, and everything was suddenly burning hot, their bodies sealed as if by glue.

Cliff yanked Will up so the boy's legs were hooked around his waist, Will's back against the tree, then muttered, "You and those tight jeans, baby. You're merciless."

"Show me what you think of them, what you think of me," Will begged, falling delightedly prey to another round of deep, hard kisses, Cliff's lips as soft as his urgency was searing and

harsh.

He bit and sucked at Will's lip, then did the same to the boy's neck, absorbing every one of Will's hapless whimpers and moans, growing more aggressive at the encouragement. "You know what I think," Cliff growled, letting Will down so he could quickly press the younger man's hands against the tree, pulling Will's hips to make him display his ass in the tight denim. "You're too perfect to be real."

He groped and spanked Will, enjoying his lover's wanton, excited noises. "Your moans make me crazy," he admitted. "And there's no one around. I could make you louder…"

"You planned it this way," Will said, breathless, letting Cliff pull him easily against his hard, bigger body, arms wrapped vice tight around Will's torso, mouth hot on Will's ear and neck.

"I just wanted to *fantasize* about acting on this," Cliff admitted huskily, inhaling deeply of Will's scent, sighing. "I'm not only too old for you, I…I don't know how to be what you need. What anyone needs. Been a wanderer for so long…"

"Take what you need from me," Will begged, turning in Cliff's arms, throwing his around the older man's neck. "That's exactly what I need. All I need in my whole life is *you*, Clifford Unger."

"Will," Cliff sighed again, mouthing at his lover's neck, sucking a love bite, then kissing Will's nape.

His hands spread across Will's front, clutching his flat stomach then feeling his pecs with hungry squeezes. He pinched Will's nipples, hissing at the way the hard nubs felt and how Will moaned, and then he kissed, bit and licked his way down Will's back.

Kneeling behind Will, Cliff pressed his face almost shyly against the younger man's ass as his hands reached around to undo his jeans.

Will was panting, chest rising and falling rapidly as his excited arousal kept galloping past where he'd ever known it to go. His cock, trapped under denim and cotton, felt heavy, rock solid, so hard he was biting his lip and digging his fingers into the tree bark, not finding any relief. Then Cliff was tugging the jeans off, and Will needed his help to even step out of them, he was so overwhelmed.

"So beautiful," Cliff marveled, kissing Will's bare hips and thighs, then his ass cheeks and hole, still teasing over his underwear.

"Cliff," Will gasped, "Please…please, Daddy…"

Cliff slapped his ass at that, then yanked his briefs down, groping Will's bare ass with a sigh of erotic wonderment.

"*Daddy?"* Cliff repeated, "What are you doing to me, baby? You'll drive me out of my mind. And what's this?"

He pressed lightly on the base of a large plug Will had been wearing all day to stay ready for him. Will closed his eyes tightly and moaned into his hands, leaning on the tree – if it wasn't there, he'd never stay upright with Cliff doing that.

"I've never done it with a man, but I wanted to learn about how to prepare," Will sighed, his confession only just about understandable between so many moans.

"Will…" Cliff slowly moved the plug in and out of him. "Oh, God, Will. You're no end of beautiful mischief. Tell me, how does this feel?"

"So fucking good," Will admitted, his breath hitching with another loud gasp as Cliff pressed the plug against his prostate. "It feels like you're fucking me…

"Good," said Cliff, slowly kissing, massaging and caressing his ass. "Look at this perfect little ass. Did it feel good to be full?"

"Mmhmm, but need more…Oh, God…Cliff….um…my jeans' pocket…"

A few moments later, Will heard the tell-tale pop of a lid and a husky chuckle that told him Cliff had gone in his jeans and found the small bottle of lube.

"You brought lube to a public park," Cliff marveled, as if scandalized. The gritty tone of his voice showed he was lost in lust.

"You just stripped my ass bare in the public park, Daddy," Will reminded him. "What do you plan to do about it?"

Cliff answered with actions this time, not words. He carefully, slowly removed the plug, then replaced it with his warm, teasing lips and tongue, licking and lapping at Will's sensitive hole.

Will was already a little worried about coming, which was too soon, even based on his limited experience with sex in general. But he might have held back, even as Cliff ate him out expertly, obviously completely obsessed with Will's ass, revealing he'd been dreaming of fucking Will all this time. Will's fantasies were full living color, and he'd never felt so much pleasure blossoming deep within him, as if he was becoming a whole other person, clay in Cliff's beautiful hands.

But Cliff reached around and started slowly, firmly stroking Will's cock as his tongue pressed just a little into his tight, but relaxed and ready hole. And Will came so fast, just from two up-and-down strokes of Cliff's calloused hand and matching in-and-out action from his tongue. Dizzy and swooning in unbearable pleasure, Will saw as if from a hazy distance how he came all over Cliff's hand and the ground; he'd never come that much. He heard someone moaning wildly; that was him–

"I love how sensitive you are, baby," Cliff smiled. He slapped Will's ass playfully and added, "turn around for me."

Gripping Will's hips, he swallowed the boy's cock down and Will's eyes rolled back, his face tipping up as he sky-rocketed into even more bliss, grabbing Cliff's soft hair and tugging, swearing enough to make a sailor blush.

"That's my good boy, Will," Cliff grinned, showing his fangs. "Adorable."

"Adorable?" Will repeated, almost numb with disbelief at the amount of pleasure his body could even contain or produce whenever Cliff wanted.

"Yes, you're the most adorable, special, perfect and beautiful person in the whole entire world. And you're all that matters to me." Cliff licked his lips, stood and kissed Will with all his heart, again and again, soul-consuming, hot, wet kisses.

"I can't believe I tried to hide how I feel," Cliff went on, whispering with the intensity of his emotions. "I'm so in love with you, baby. And I need you to be mine."

"I already am," Will promised, kissing Cliff wildly, anywhere his lips could reach as his hands fumbled to undress the older man. "God, why are you still wearing clothes?"

"I had other priorities," Cliff smirked, still showing his "priorities" as he chose first to pull Will's shirt off before undressing himself.

Will put his arms up obediently; Cliff flung the shirt away, grabbed Will's hands and put them on his cargo pants' fly.

"I'm fucking up at work," Will admitted, staring down as he unfastened Cliff's pants and shoved them down, then more gently tugged down Cliff's black briefs. "This is all I think about, Daddy…all day…and – you're even bigger than I expected."

Cliff put a hand in Will's hair, pulled his curls and then used his hold to guide Will to his knees. "Then suck me, baby, take me in that pretty mouth."

Will did as he was told again. Cliff held his face and smoothly slid in and out of his mouth, so that all Will had to do was learn how to take it. Apparently, this was how Cliff liked to get head, and it was the sexiest thing Will could imagine, having his mouth fucked full of hard, big, thick cock, Cliff's precum dripping all over his tongue. He started choking when Cliff thrust faster, deeper, and although Cliff tried to move back, concerned, Will grabbed his thighs to keep the man's dick in as deep as he could take it.

Cliff's knees buckled and he grabbed Will's shoulder and hair even harder. "*Fuck, fuck, fuck,*" he swore vehemently, pulling his cock out of Will's delirious mouth to discover he had somehow gotten even harder and bigger, dripping pearly desire non-stop. All for Will.

"Oh, wow, Daddy, you're so much…so much for me to take," Will said, blissed out, smiling and staring to his heart's content. "You're beautiful and perfect…"

He got Cliff's shirt off him at long, long last and instantly roved his hands all over the older man's hairy chest, then licked his lover's nipples, enjoying Cliff's continued gasps.

“I can’t take it anymore, I have to be inside you,” Cliff sighed, and with that he picked Will up, put his back against the tree, and slid his huge cock right into the younger man’s prepared hole, inch by rigid, dripping, hot inch.

“Baby,” Cliff grunted, “So good, feels incredible – fuck – so tight and warm–”

Will’s mouth was open in shock, his eyes big and full of tears, his nails digging into Cliff’s back, leaving scratch marks. It made Cliff start fucking him for real, and then Will found his voice again, hooking his ankles around Cliff’s back.

“Daddy, you’re so big, I can barely take it – fuck – fuck me, harder, *please, please,*” Will begged, face reddening with exertion and pleasure.

Cliff was staring down between them, watching his cock, slick with lube and Will’s saliva, gliding in and out of the younger man’s tight body. “So goddamn good,” Cliff groaned, staring and moving faster now.

After taking Will hard against the tree, Cliff held onto him and laid him on the grass, uncaring of the flowers and dirt getting all over their naked forms as they immediately started writhing, rutting their hard, leaking cocks together.

“You’re sweeter than honeysuckle, beautiful, naughty boy,” Cliff declared, kissing Will’s mouth madly, grinding down and frotting their cocks together perfectly. “Your kisses taste like sunshine – I’ll always love you–”

Leave it to Cliff to be a hopeless romantic and drop sweet nothings, all while taking Will to spellbinding, shamelessly public orgasms on the damn ground, rolling around in dirt and grass, flowers getting stuck in their hair. That was just Cliff, and Will kept falling more and more in love with him.

“I’ll always love you, too,” he smiled, holding Cliff’s face in both hands, tracing the tears of fearful happiness that dripped down his lover’s face. “Don’t ever worry about that.”

“Oh, Will…” Cliff couldn’t get enough of his lips, or the way it felt to run his hands all over the younger man and grope, spank, squeeze however he liked. High on Will’s moans again, he said more mischievously, “I’m worried about your work performance, though.”

“Don’t be,” Will grinned, sitting up so that he could get Cliff underneath him and ride him to bursting. He needed to bounce on that huge cock and feel Daddy’s seed rushing into him, hot and sticky. All his.

“All you need to do is fuck me real hard, every single day and night, and I’ll keep a clear head at the station,” Will said, his earnest, naive look somewhat ruined by the way he straddled Cliff, slowly lowering himself down on the older man’s cock.

“Get ready to feel amazingly lucid,” Cliff promised, snarling at the pleasure he took from Will moving up and down on his slick length. “That’s it – take what you want, feels so fucking good–baby –!”

Will cried out when he came again, telling Cliff he loved him right before the soldier gripped his hips harder and fucked up into him brutally, spilling his cum deep inside Will with a ragged gasp.

“Best thing I ever felt,” Will groaned, leaning over Cliff, peppering kisses on his warm chest. “Daddy, I love you so much.”

“I’ll never get tired of hearing that,” said Cliff, once again with the purest smile for someone who had just fucked his new boyfriend in broad daylight, where anyone might walk by.

***

Now.

"you look twice as good as anyone I ever met

And your love is three times better

How could anyone forget?

No, I can't" -Ariana Grande

***

“Oh, my God, you’re here, you’re really here,” Will panted disbelievingly between hot, intense kisses.

Cliff had just pulled Will’s sexy little white t-shirt over his head and dropped it to the floor, instantly getting his hands all over the gorgeous boy. His smooth skin, so warm and soft, firm in the right places, places that had his heart jumping as his cock grew thick, so fast his head spun.

A few dogs came over curiously, circling them a couple of times before reasoning the visitor hadn’t brought any food and their master was going to be busy for a while. A little dog yapped in slight frustration and a larger one gave a soft whine.

“Shhh, go sit, it’s okay, this is my old friend Cliff, he’s your friend too, now,” Will said to the dogs, and as Cliff ran his hands wonderingly over Will’s shoulders, his arms and back.

“There’s your pack,” Cliff laughed gently, remembering the dogs so well it was like he had already met them, based on Will’s descriptions during their phone calls. “Here’s your house.”

“*Here's* my home,” Will smiled, slipping a hand under Cliff’s shirt, which he’d insistently pulled out of its neatly tucked-on position during their kisses. Now, he put his hand on Cliff’s pounding heartbeat, fingers sliding through soft chest hair to feel hot skin.

Cliff blushed, self-conscious after all these years. Of course, Will was not only perfect, but even more beautiful than he remembered. There was a haunted look in his sweet boy’s eyes that contrasted with his delighted smiles and laughter, and Cliff would never rest until he healed anything that hurt in Will.

“I know I came unannounced,” Cliff murmured, licking and sucking at Will’s neck as the boy unbuttoned his shirt, moaning at the way Cliff kissed and marked his sensitive skin, claiming him. “Do you have anything planned for today?”

“I didn’t have anything important to do until now,” Will said in an aroused tone that went right to Cliff’s dick so fast, he bit down on the pale, soft neck with a needy groan. “Ah! Yeah, oh, feels so good. Mmm, don’t stop…”

Cliff stood there staring at him as Will shoved off his lover’s nicest shirt and started on his nicest *trousers,* yanking the belt open with a teasing, naughty smirk.

He was being stripped of his clothes in the middle of a lazy Autumn afternoon in Wolf Trap, Virginia, and the hands all over his body, the voice calling his name, the realness of Will made Cliff shudder in bone-deep desire.

“I missed you so much, Daddy,” Will said seductively, touching his chest again, then flicking a hard nipple before biting his lip.

“Will Graham…” Cliff shook his head, a growl building in his throat. “*Boy*…you know exactly what it does to me when you call me that.”

“Good,” Will smiled resplendently, going down on his knees like the well-behaved boy he was, unzipping Cliff’s pants and pulling them until they slid down to the older man’s nicest dress shoes. “I’m glad to see some things never change.”

When Will sucked him, it actually hurt – to be so touch-starved, to have gone this long without having a human touch, without having sex, he moaned in excruciating, mind-blowing pleasure, fucking his boy’s mouth the way he knew his Will thrived on.

“Poor Daddy, it’s been way too long, huh?” Will pulled his mouth off, impatient already for Cliff to fuck him. “I could keep your cock in my mouth all day if you wanted, you taste so good, but if you wanna fuck me, I need it Daddy, I need it so, so badly–”

Will barely got a chance to take another breath before he was in bed and his ankles were high over his head. Cliff was eating his ass as if it was his new job, groaning and gasping in delight at the taste and feeling of the boy he’d missed so terribly. Had Will forgotten how far Cliff would go for him, that he only had to ask, and if he needed something, like getting fucked until he forgot everything else, fucked until the bedframe almost broke, ramming against the wall, fucked held down and made to take every thick inch again and again? If he needed that, he’d get it, and then some. Cliff would drop everything, come running from any distance.

“You still feel so damn perfect inside me,” Will moaned tearfully, smiling as Cliff split him open on his big, hard dick. “*Fuck.* So good, Daddy…yeah, *please don’t stop*...”

“Good boy,” Cliff growled, fucking Will from behind and spanking his boy just like he remembered the pretty little thing loved to get it.

Will loved to be spanked even when he'd been on good behavior, and it was Cliff's honor to bestow such undeserved punishment, Will's favorite treat.

By the time Cliff was temporarily done with his body. Will was a mess, having come three times, until he was sweaty, exhausted, hair a wild display of lovely curls, his whole form covered in Cliff's claiming marks, and Cliff's second load dripping out of his hole.

The third orgasm had been ripped from him, his prostate pummeled ruthlessly by Daddy's rigid dick until Will's hips spasmed and he came dry, entire body trembling. He cried, cried with the pleasure, pain, overstimulated ecstasy, and with how much he had missed Cliff, how well Daddy took care of him. Cliff bit his neck even harder and came balls deep inside him, and Will whispered fiercely, "I wish I could keep you in me forever, this deep, like that."

***

Cliff refused to smoke unless he did so all the way across the house, standing by the front door where he had placed the ashtray Will fished out of a drawer for him.

"You can sit with me, Cliff, really, it doesn't bother me," Will pouted, regretting his insistence that the older man have a cigarette if he wanted, remembering how he'd watched Cliff smoke with child-like awe back in the day.

Will was trying to be nice with the blurted suggestion, but while Cliff made smoking look sinfully good, he wanted to encourage his lover to kick the habit.

"No, that would be rude," Cliff said, as if he was in some precious hotel instead of Will's little country house, and definitely as if Will's home was far more important to him than any such luxurious location.

It still looked sexy as fuck when he smoked, especially with Cliff naked save for Will's bedsheet wrapped loosely around his hips. The sight of Cliff's sumptuous lips wrapped around the cigarette, inhaling and then sighing it out made Will's chest and stomach clutch with desire. His cock twitched, unable to get hard again, equally unable to resist responding to Cliff.

"I actually want you to quit," Will smiled as Cliff came back to him.

Ohh, Daddy was so big, so warm, firm and perfect, hugging Will against him on the soft couch by the space heater. It felt like Will could breathe again, even as he felt his own feverish sweat coming back, outlasting the heat of their sex.

"Then I'll quit smoking," Cliff promised, "I'll wean myself. Cut out one smoke a day until there's none left. Whatever you need, Will, anything you want."

"Awww, Cliff, you don't have to…"

"Yes, yes, I do, baby, my baby," Cliff murmured, voice low and ragged with admiring, sensuous joy as he held his boy. "Will, I'd give you the world, the universe, everything. You're my darling. Your kisses still taste like sunshine, you know."

“How could they?” Will grinned, nuzzling into Cliff. “Mmm. I’m a mess lately. God, how I needed you to come to me.”

“Then I’m glad I got over my mind-numbing insecurity and fear of rejection, fear of disappointing you,” Cliff laughed shakily. His hands trembled on Will in those little tremors he got at times, uncontrollable.

Will kissed his chest. “You’re the opposite of a disappointment. You’re the best thing that ever happened to me.”

***

Cliff did all the things he used to, not because Will asked or because he guessed the nostalgia would be pleasing to his lover. Because he was a creature of reliable, dad-ish habit, and he was getting comfortable in Will’s house, the only sight Will had wanted to see for so very long, never dreaming he would get to have it.

After building a real fire in the fireplace, Cliff greeted the cooler evening by making them cheese and tomato sandwiches, his old standard, the simple dinner seeming like the best thing Will had ever tasted. He turned Will’s radio on and found the oldies station.

And then? Then, he danced Will around the house while they were both clad in nothing but underwear. Spinning and dipping Will, but handling him with infinite, tender care. Kissing Will and murmuring softly, “Still as sweet as honeysuckle.”

Cliff had to take the dogs outside, of course, since he was “giving Will a break,” and in the meantime, since Cliff insisted on being the most charming man who ever lived, Will had to pay him back.

The older man came back in to find Will waiting for him with a shy smile, wearing Cliff’s nicest shirt, left unbuttoned, and his own skimpiest pair of silk panties which he had bought on a whim one day and never actually worn till now.

“Where in the world did these come from?” Cliff asked, having instantly gathered Will in his arms for a warm kiss.

Will savored the slightly colder feeling of Cliff’s larger body holding him and those addictive kisses, lazy and slow now, exploring, relaxed. Cliff firmly groped him and rubbed his ass, feeling the shape of him under the silver silk.

“I have a lot of fantasies involving you showing up out of nowhere someday,” Will admitted blushing. “And me wearing these for you was, well…one of them.”

This got Will taken back to bed, fucked until he couldn’t even keep his eyes open. He hadn’t slept so well since the last time he’d drifted off in Cliff’s loving embrace.

***

“Baby, what’s wrong?” Cliff asked the following morning, a few minutes after that *creep* Dr. Lecter finally got lost.

He'd barely held back from letting that man know just what he thought of him crossing the lines with Will that way, going from therapist to friend, clearly nosing into Will's business. Dr. Lecter obviously had designs on Cliff's boy, and jealousy aside, Cliff didn't like the way the other man eyed his darling Will, not one bit.

All Cliff had done, in the end, was clearly explain that he and Will had a past and were together again, official, and exclusive. This was all that needed to be said, perhaps. It wasn't all Cliff wanted to say…but if it would make Will happy for him to be polite to that asshole, he could try.

Now, they were finally alone again, but Will was swaying on his feet like a wilting flower.

"Dizzy," Will admitted, "s'okay, it happens to me sometimes lately…"

"It *what?*" Cliff asked, surprised as he caught Will in his arms.

They stood in the kitchen as Cliff examined him, a sinking feeling in his stomach. "Will, have you been sick? Why didn't you tell me? Have you seen a doctor?" He couldn't stop the questions tumbling from his mouth.

"No, but I know that I should. Work's just been so demanding…"

Will sighed and wrapped his arms around Cliff, and as his forehead brushed Cliff's cheek between cute little kisses the younger man gave him on his jaw and neck, the soldier gasped.

"You're burning up, baby," he said, now really worried. "I think you have a fever."

"Probably, again," Will laughed shakily.

"I have to get you to a doctor right away," Cliff insisted, panicking and trying to hide it. "This doesn't feel right to me. Why didn't that – *urrghhh* that *so-called* therapist of yours tell you to see a doctor? You're clearly ill."

He clutched Will, the terror of Lisa's death coming back to him, the memory of losing their child. "I can't lose you," he whispered desperately.

"You won't," Will assured him, about as firmly as he could while dizzy and sweating.

Cliff felt his boy's clammy forehead; cold sweat, but Will's skin was like putting his hand in a flame.

"We're going straight to the hospital," Cliff announced, the fear a rough undercurrent in his voice, choppy waters even a sick Will could intuit.

"Don't worry, Cliff. It comes and goes, I've been meaning to have this looked at…"

"You told me that already, sweetie. Now, then, let's get your coat."

Once Will was ready to go and mumbled to Cliff that Alana could be told to check in on the dogs later, the older man sent a polite text to the number Will provided. And then Cliff swept

Will right off his feet, as he had always done, right from the beginning, and always would.

He carried Will to the car, and soon after, they were at the nearest hospital in Fell's Church, Virginia. Cliff brought his boy to the emergency room, heart in his throat, and Will was admitted as an overnight patient. His symptoms were concerning, but most likely not life-threatening.

The doctors said it was lucky they came when they did. Will even said, now that he was officially questioned, he'd been suffering terrible headaches and nightmares (sometimes waking!) for weeks.

Cliff paced the hall outside Will's room. He realized in a shock of fury, there was no possible way Lecter hadn't known something was wrong with Will. The boy was too sick for anything else to be possible, and Lecter had a slimy, sneaky look about him. It turned Cliff's stomach. He'd get to the bottom of this, and do something about it, that was for sure.

At the moment, his immediate concern was remaining by Will's bedside until visiting hours ended. He'd sleep in the waiting room and go back to Will as soon as the hours started again tomorrow morning. That's if he could sleep a wink.

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Will needed to be on IV's of fluids, and to have bedrest for several days. Cliff couldn't stand how small and weak his darling boy looked, in the thin hospital gown, on that hard bed that couldn't be comfortable enough for him. With needles in his perfect arms because this illness had been allowed to progress so far.

So far, Will's life could have been in danger if they had waited another few days before seeking help, the doctor said, the one who assigned Will to bedrest and the needles – everything was swirling in Cliff's mind. He imagined horrible outcomes that might have occurred if he hadn't visited, if he'd been a coward and gone back to the airport without going to Will yesterday. What could have happened?

The next morning found Cliff, with a stiff back from the waiting room chairs and sleepy eyes from almost no sleep at all, waiting at the desk, until he could go and see Will. The beautiful boy was getting better now, Cliff could see that there had been progress already, from a full night's sleep with the fluids.

Cliff could breathe again, he could see the future unclouded from Will's life being threatened. But he couldn't get himself to feel regular again, or take the edge of fear off himself.

"Cliff, I'm *fine,*" Will smiled, but he still looked more tired than Cliff ever wanted to see him.

"The sickness really did come and go, didn't it? The day I arrived, you didn't seem sick, just a little overworked. I never would have made love to you that roughly if you'd said you were sick."

"Oh, it never even occurred to me," Will admitted sheepishly, blushing. "I was so wrapped up in seeing you and being together, I couldn't have been happier, or felt better. If anything, you

brought me back to life again; you didn't hurt me, Cliff. I promise. If I thought you were really hurting me, I'd tell you. Trust me?"

His sweet voice soothed Cliff. He nodded fast, raking a hand through his silver hair, swallowing hard. "I think I'm quitting cigarettes cold turkey," he admitted, laughing nervously.

"That's one way to do it," Will smiled crookedly.

He was too fucking cute, in that stupid little bed in the polka dot white gown. Cliff had brought him more flowers, beautiful ones that paled in comparison to his boy's sunshiney smile. Trying to make Cliff feel better even as *Will* was the one suffering, healing.

Will had been *suffering,* dammit, and Cliff hadn't known. What the hell else had been going on around here? Now he was getting paranoid.

"Promise me you'll take better care of yourself from now on, Will. I'll be here, taking care of you, too," Cliff assured him, "But you need to care more about yourself. For us. You deserve nothing but the best, in every part of this life. Promise?"

"I promise." Will squeezed his hand lightly, letting out a small cough which he covered with his other. "I think I need to sleep again, babe."

"Alright, sweetie." Cliff stood and brushed a kiss to Will's forehead, so relieved it was only warm now, not burning hot.

"Can't you rest? Go back to my place, sleep? You have circles under your eyes." Will looked at him sleepily.

"I can't go home without you," Cliff said with another of his anxious, soft chuckles. "Oh, baby, I just *can't.* It wouldn't be home anyway. Your friend Alana said she's taking good care of the dogs, so that's all set."

Will nodded, "It would be totally futile to argue with you about staying here. Do you know you're the best man in the world, Clifford Unger?"

"I only know I'm in love with the most perfect boy that ever was." Cliff kissed Will's cheek gently and then let him rest.

It was going to take time, Cliff wasn't sure how long, for him to fully calm down after the fright of seeing Will that sick. In the meantime, he would try and get back to normal, for *Will,* for the love they had rediscovered, the love he'd do anything in the world to keep forever.

He wasn't sure what to do with himself, knowing he ought to actually rest, but his body wouldn't let him. Still all strung out from last night's anxiety, he kept getting the shakes in his hands and his heart would speed up in small, random panics.

After watching Will attentively for some time and then walking around the hospital without a direction, Cliff decided to go to the gift shop and find another present or two for Will when he woke up.

But he stopped short halfway down the hallway that led from Will's room to the elevator. That fucking *rat bastard* Hannibal Lecter came out of the elevator just as Cliff was heading for it, to go down to the lobby and its gift shop.

He would take care of this, first.

How had Lecter found out that Will was here? That friend, Cliff reasoned, it must be. Alana – and it wasn't even her fault most likely; he bet most of this son of a bitch's friends had no idea he was some kind of evil psychopath.

But Cliff saw right through Lecter, and there was no doubt in his mind that this cruel sadist had known Will was severely ill, and let - it - *happen.*

Lecter had shown up in another three piece suit, all pressed and tailored fake goodness, with a big bouquet, much fancier and pricier than Cliff's own offering. The flowers went flying when Cliff barreled into Hannibal and shoved him into the nearest wall before he could get anywhere near Will.

"How dare you?" Lecter responded angrily, his amber eyes flaring as Cliff's green ones narrowed. "Let go, you cretin, or I'll call for help."

"There's no help for you," Cliff insisted, elbow across Hannibal's chest. The doctor was strong and fit, but Cliff was bigger and had military expertise.

For the moment, Lecter wasn't going anywhere. Hannibal looked like a fool, writhing and attempting to break loose, insulting Cliff in all sorts of pompous ways, dropping absurd, lying accusations that *Cliff* was the one who endangered Will and couldn't be trusted.

As dumb as Hannibal looked, Cliff's mood was too savage for him to even have a moment of twisted amusement. Instead, his eyes darkened and glittered as he sneered, shoving Lecter hard against the wall again and enjoying the man's low, embarrassed noise of pain.

"You're not getting anywhere near Will, ever again," Cliff threatened, pointing right in his face. "And I only have one question for you, you evil bastard, since I know damn well you let that sweet boy stay sick out of some insane, selfish agenda of your own. One goddamn question, *Lecter.* How do you want to die?"

Chapter End Notes

Next time: gulp….the confrontation continues…what is Will going to have to say about all of this?

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End Notes

🖤 **Fic playlist** 🖤**:** https://open.spotify.com/playlist/1CewIQJ1lZWWmck4ESGSh6?si=3d0c413cb5e84087

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